



Recommendations for maximising a child's listening skills

Improving the listening environment

There are two main causes of a poor listening environment: noise and reverberation. Noise is any sound competing with the one you are trying to hear. Therefore background noise, which may occur inside or outside the room, needs to be reduced.

Inside:

- To improve the listening environment while having a conversation, either lower the volume or switch off the television or music system.
- Be aware of the noise produced by appliances such as fan heaters, air conditioning units, light fittings, washing machines, dishwashers, tumble dryers, etc.
- Attach rubber or felt pads to tables and chair legs.

Outside:

- Keep windows and doors closed to block/reduce outside noise. Secondary or double glazed windows are better at keeping noise out.
- Reverberation is when a sound bounces off hard surfaces in the room. This may interfere with the voice of the speaker.
- Reverberation can be reduced by covering hard surfaces with soft materials, for example carpets, wall hangings, soft pin boards, curtains, table clothes, etc.
- An assistive listening device, particularly one that conveys the sound from a microphone near the speaker's mouth directly to the child may also be helpful.

Listening strategies: considerations for improved listening

Better seating

- Ensure that the child is seated close to the speaker and away from any noisy equipment such as overhead fans.

Considerations for the speaker

- The child should be positioned close to the speaker so that facial expressions can be observed.



- The speaker should gain the child's attention before speaking by calling their name or by tapping them to ensure they are looking at the speaker.
- The speaker's face should be visible and well lit. Light should, therefore, shine on the speaker's face, rather than the light source being behind the speaker.
- Visual cues such as clues from lip reading may be helpful. The speaker should not hide lip movements behind their hands.
- The use of pictures or diagrams may also be helpful.
- The speaker should positively reinforce good listening skills.

The speaker:

- Should use short, simple sentences and should speak clearly, without shouting. The speaker should not speak too quickly, but should maintain a normal rhythm of speech. Pauses in between sentences allow the child time to process what is being said
- Should repeat or rephrase instructions if these have not been understood. For example, in a group situation, such as in class discussions, it would be helpful if the teacher could repeat or rephrase the contributions of other class members. This would provide an additional opportunity for the child to lip-read
- Could ask open questions or have the child repeat back the information to see if this has been understood
- Should be aware that unfamiliar accents may be difficult for the child to understand
- Should keep their head fairly still when speaking and avoid moving around while talking or using unnecessary hand movements which distract the child's attention. In particular, teachers should avoid speaking while writing on the board
- Should avoid speaking from a different room, with a head in a cupboard, or while looking at a book or a newspaper
- Should avoid standing with their back to a window

Considerations for the child

When someone speaks, clues are gained not only from what is heard but also from what is seen. These clues complement and supplement each other. The child should be made aware that listening is a skill that requires active engagement.

The child should:

- Be encouraged to 'look and listen' when someone is talking so as to get as much information as possible from the message
- Be encouraged to ask for clarification if something has not been heard or understood
- Sit in an upright position, inclining the head towards the speaker.
- Try to keep fidgeting to a minimum which may help the child focus on what the speaker is saying
- Be made aware of the context of a discussion prior to being addressed. This is particularly helpful for participation in group situations such as a classroom setting



Useful resources

National Deaf Children's Society

The National Deaf Children's Society is a leading charity for deaf children. They provide information resources about hearing loss in children: www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support

Action on hearing loss

The UK's national charity helping people who are confronting life-changing deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss – they provide information resources for people with hearing loss:

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

More information

For more information about the paediatric audiology service at Whittington Health, please visit our website: <https://www.whittington.nhs.uk/default.asp?c=11238>

References

- Leaflets from Specialist Team (Support for Children and Young People with Hearing Loss)
- Barnet Children's Hearing Services APD Leaflet



Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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